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ABSTRACT

An analysis of scholarly publications in applied linguistics focuses on the use of such publications as "dialogue" between applied linguists to promote social responsibility in the application of their work. A review of 40 citations representing 63 papers is presented and results are discussed. Common strategies found for dispelling misconceptions included argument, citation of literature, annotated bibliography, methodological refutation or criticism, improved translation from a historic document, clarification of legal reference, sentiment, coining of a term, claim of incomplete review of literature, and analogy. Common topics addressed included the whole language/phonics debate, the role of government and politics as an influence on applied linguistics, how to serve language minority students, gender and language, literacy, proficiency versus accuracy in second/foreign languages, topics in speech and hearing science (e.g., stuttering, aphasia), language death, language and perception of reality, and existence of language in species other than humans. All citations are listed. Contains four notes and six references. (MSE)

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# Setting the Record Straight:
# Applied Linguistics and the Dispelling of Misconception.

by

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Setting the Record Straight:
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Abstract.

One means of ensuring social responsibility in applied linguistics (AL) literature is examined. Published 'dialogs' between scholars may be seen to serve this function if the authors strive to correct misconception -- to set the record straight -- and also claim or suggest that failing to do so would engender some social ills. Sixty-three such published papers from forty citations are reported in a literature review. Two types of findings are discussed: the strategies to dispel misconceptions and the particular misconceptions dispelled (and their social implications). Certain tendencies and trends are noted. This academic dialog phenomenon is suggested as a process by which AL ensures social responsibility. The need for greater communication between academic and non-academic AL settings is also discussed.

Setting the Record Straight:
Applied Linguistics and the Dispelling of Misconception.

Introduction.

This paper grew out of a 1995 colloquium at the meeting of American Association of Applied Linguistics. The topic of the colloquium was "Applied Linguistics and Social Responsibility". A question relevant to that topic is this: how does applied linguistics monitor social responsibility? What mechanism(s) already exist by which applied linguists can ensure that no social ills results from their work?

One way to monitor social responsibility is by the very active give-and-take of published articles. As scholarship finds its way into print, so too does **criticism** of that scholarship. Often, this takes the form of a 'response', a 'critique', an 'answer to so-and-so'. Often, 'so-and-so' responds. Always, the dialogue is energetic because the authors are quite energetic in the attack and the defense.

This publication phenomenon can be given a name: **dialogs**. Can dialogs be seen as a monitoring device of social responsibility in applied linguistics? Perhaps they can, in published work which purports to 'set the record straight' and worry about social ills. Dispelling misconception, eliminating myth, setting the record straight, arguing that something is a fallacy -- all these rhetorical activities could be instances of dialogs where

ethics and social responsibility are involved, if the author also claims or implies that some social consequence could ensue if the record is **not** put right.

For example, a scholar might an idea and publish it, to the effect that 'A is B'. Another researcher might read that paper and write a counter-argument: "No, A is not B," says the critic. "If A were B then there would be harmful consequences to society." The original author might reply: "Wait. A can be B without harmful social consequences. You are wrong." Or, alternatively, the original author might reply: "Hold on. That's not fair. That's not what I meant when I said that A is B. I certainly did not want to imply any social ills!"

This article concerns itself with published scholarship in applied linguistics which is of that nature. The scholarship reviewed here must be of the dialog type, and in some manner the dialog must address or suggest social consequences. This paper then poses a question: on examining a review of such socially-motivated dialog in applied linguistics scholarship, what trends are seen and what does that say about the social state of health of our field?

Before exploring this topic, it is first necessary to operationalize the term 'applied linguistics'. This paper takes applied linguistics to be a broad term, transcending the application of theoretical or formal linguistics to problems of language

teaching and learning (e.g. Bell, 1981). The preference is for the 'weak' definition which Markee (1990) describes and favors. Clearly, the precise definition of 'applied linguistics' is a still a matter of debate, as seen in the discussions by James (1993) and Sridhar (1993).

This broad definition is necessary for two reasons. First, the study can tap into a wider variety of academic literature and enhance the generalizability of its findings. Second, if the definition of 'applied linguistics' were restricted to problems of second and foreign language teaching and acquisition, it seems difficult to draw precise boundaries of that discipline. For example, this study includes a paper on stuttering (citation 10). Some might argue that speech disorders science does not belong in applied linguistics. However, last year at the author's university an ESL student enrolled who was also a stutterer. Determining a precise service arrangement for him was rather complicated. More generally, it seems better to err on the side of wide applicability than miss something that might be relevant, all because of a narrow definition of one's daily work domain.

Methodology.

In order to pursue dialogs in applied linguistics, a search was begun of two online abstracting databases: 'ERIC' or the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse and 'LLBA' or the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts. In case the organ-

izers of the database did not apply descriptor labels in the manner of interest here, keyword searches were employed. That is, a word or phrase was entered the computer allowed to identify a record -- a 'hit' -- if the word or phrase appeared in many places in the bibliographic entry: the title, the descriptors, or the abstract or other fields including the actual ERIC or LLBA descriptors.

To decide on keywords/key phrases, various thesauri and dictionaries were consulted. The semantic sense sought was 'to set the record straight', which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as: "to achieve a proper record of the facts; to correct a misapprehension". One of the OED's examples, taken from the Oxford Consumer, is precisely the sense desired: "Mr. Shergold made further investigations and sent us the following letter which should help to set the record straight."

In addition to keywords conveying that sense, the study also used two search strings to identify citations where the author was "responding" or "replying" to a previously published piece. That is, it is assumed that there was a greater likelihood of dispelling a misconception when the author identified the citation as an instance of the dialog phenomenon. These additional search strings were limited to appearance in the title of the citation, though that did not really help eliminate the large literatures on topics like 'response rate'.[1]

Table 1 is a record of hits in ERIC and LLBA going back to the inception of each online database: the mid-60s and early 70s respectively. The column labeled 'search string' is a result of the work with thesauri and dictionaries; and clearly, there are other strings which could also have been used. Some search strings are wild cards, e.g. 'repl*' represents both 'reply' and 'replies'. All search strings were crossed with the string 'language'; this is more of an issue in ERIC than LLBA, because the latter is solely a language database. Under the 'ERIC' and 'LLBA' columns in Table 1 are two sub-columns: 'hits' and 'candidates'. 'Hits' are the number of records returned from the database containing the phrases given in the search string column. 'Candidates' are the number of records for which, based solely on the ERIC or LLBA database abstract, it seemed there was some likelihood that this was an instance of dialog and that social consequence was involved. In short, 'Candidates' represent a count of the citations that could be instances of the target of the study.[2]

It is interesting to note that ERIC had no hits on the string 'set record straight'. (The definite article is a stop word and cannot be searched.) Other search strings were far more productive. LLBA did have one and only one instance of 'set record straight'. It was pulled as a candidate, consulted, and included in the study; it is Shannon's piece (citation 32). That article had no abstract by the author, and the LLBA personnel who

did the abstract retained the use of 'set the record straight' from the article, a quote which appears at the end of the paper, below.

| Row | Case insensitive search string, and "language" | ERIC hits | ERIC candi-dates | LLBA hits | LLBA candi-dates |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | set right | 26 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| B | enlighten | 6 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| C | misperce* | 18 | 3 | 37 | 6 |
| D | misinterpre* | 77 | 13 | 209 | 96 |
| E | misrepre* | 37 | 10 | 97 | 67 |
| F | rectify | 20 | 0 | 13 | 5 |
| G | misconce* | 220 | 41 | 224 | 144 |
| H | fallacy | 69 | 27 | 101 | 64 |
| I | repl* (in title) | 94 | 68 | 273 | 160 |
| J | respon* (in title) | 683 | 91 | 597 | 85 |
| K | set record straight | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals --> | | 1250 | 254 | 1560 | 629 |

Table 1:
Hit/Candidate record

(Note on Table 1: for ERIC, hits include ERIC documents and journals, but ERIC candidates include journals only. An ERIC document is a paper submitted directly to ERIC by the author(s). LLBA indexes only journals. Finally, the hits/candidates across

both databases are not exclusive: some articles were found in both.)

As shown in Table 1, the above process yielded 883 candidate articles across the two databases, although there was some duplication of articles cited in both, and again, this was over the life of each database, i.e., several decades. The figure 883 is the result of adding 254 and 629 from the 'Totals' at the bottom.

Articles were then consulted in detail. To lend some objectivity to the endeavor, articles were examined backward by date: 1994, 1993, 1992. Doing so allows recency in the generalizability of the findings. Some articles were discarded as non-candidates when no clear treatment of social consequence could be located, i.e., articles where the ERIC or LLBA abstract had suggested some social aspect, but for which -- on further reading -- that turned out not to be the case. As can be seen from the dates of the forty references on the handout, the review reached into 1991.

40 citations are reported in this study, and are given and numbered in the bibliography. A citation is either a single article or a cluster of articles, e.g. a lead article with invited responses or a pair of articles. An example of the former is citation 14. An example if the latter is citation 20. If the number individual scholarly publications is counted -- e.g., counting number 20 as two not one -- then this study reviews 63

papers, and not 40. One citation -- number 15 -- is a book.

Results and Discussion.

Two types of results will be presented. First is a report on some of the common strategies used in these citations to help dispel misconception. Second are comments on what subjects are set straight -- that is, some trends are noted concerning topics under discussions in these instances of dialog about misconception and social responsibility.

Argument was a very common strategy. For example, in 23, Klingner worries "that Neuman and Koskinen's findings could be misinterpreted and overgeneralized to all bilingual students rather than some advanced ESL students." (p. 377). The issue she is making concerns whether closed-captioned television should be used as a teaching tool in ESL here in the U.S. She is reasoning from a potential mis-application of Neuman and Koskinen's findings, and her worry is basically expressed as a what-if argument. As another example, Byrnes' critique of Valette uses, among other strategies, the argumentative technique of 'either-or'. In comparing language proficiency and fossilization, she says: "...our inquiry cannot be phrased as an either-or dichotomy -- **either** ability to use the language at a high level **or** accuracy. Instead we need to see both aspects together." (p. 371 in citation 5, emphasis original). This either-or technique will turn up again in the whole language / phonics literature cited

below. Yet another example of argument is one where logic itself is at issue: in 24, Lantoff and Frawley analyze and take exception to some logical reasoning in an earlier article by Hagen. Generally, reasoning pervades these papers.

Another technique is citation of literature. Often, the record is set straight by an author pointing out articles that another author missed, or by re-interpreting findings and claims from other articles. In this regard, there is one very clear example, one which may be of particular interest to applied linguists who use statistical analysis. In citation 4, Burgoon et al. try to close a debate which they say goes back to the early 1970s, in particular to papers by Clark. Burgoon et al. is in Communication Quarterly, but the misconception they rectify has relevance to many disciplines which use statistics, and so it is an example of the broader definition of applied linguistics. Their issue is this: in empirical science, should categorical language variables be treated as 'fixed' or 'random' effects in Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)? The choice of fixed or random has implications for generalizability of findings. For example, as Burgoon et al. note, if a study on advertising includes a single advertising message as the input, can its findings be extended to other messages? Further, there could be several messages forming an independent variable, but those messages could be treated as fixed measurements rather than random samples from some larger

universe of messages, and in this case, presumably, generalizability is reduced. With regard to literature citation, Burgoon et al note at several points that the debate on fixed and random effects has been going on for some time and needs to be drawn to a close. That is, they **cite** the long debate literature and **note** how it supports their point, **but they also** say 'enough is enough.' (For the record, Burgoon et al, using an actual study and statistical method comparison, favor either meta analysis or "the well-controlled single-message design" (p. 20)). This strategy of Burgoon et al. suggests that one way to set the record straight is to review the literature and in particular, its **mass**, thereby showing how a debate should be ended.

A related technique appears in citation 2. In her introductory remarks, Goossens notes that there had been no comprehensive bibliography on gender and language since one assembled by Cheris Kramrae and others in 1983. She uses her introduction to bring the reader up to date on what has been happening in this regard. We have, thus, another example of the use of citation of literature as a technique to set the record right, but in this case it is citation of a unique type: it is an annotated bibliography. The 87 publications which Ayim and Goossens abstract serve to let the reader know what has been happening, and thus dispel myth. Since their work appears in a journal aimed at researchers -- a 'resources' journal -- it could be assumed that they were motivated to provide scholars with the latest and most precise infor-

mation, to put the record straight.

There are many other myth-dispelling strategies in these papers, for instance,

-methodological refutation or criticism (7, 20, 23, or 31);

-improved translation from an important historical document (10)

-clarification of the precise dictum of a U.S. federal law (Neuman's response to Klingner in 23);

-a sentiment like 'you have misunderstood my country' (9)

-coining a term ('pseudo-immersion' in 17);

-a claim that the critic did not read all the literature produced by the authors being criticized (Pienemann et al.'s response to Hudson in 20);

-an analogy (to baseball) (36);

-and examples of something like "careful re-reading would indicate that I did **not** say that!" (26).

In addition to strategies employed to dispel the myth, this study can address the question: what records were being corrected? What topics did these papers tend to cover and what did they tend to say?

One common topic being debated extensively in these dialogs is the whole language / phonics debate, which is covered in citations 1, 6, 14, 15, 16, and to some extent 32. Space does not permit a detailed reporting of all the facets of this argument. In a nutshell, the question is this: for children, what is the best method to teach reading? By attention to the sound-

symbol correspondence (phonics) or by attention to larger holistic reader-responsive meaning (whole language)? These papers seem to indicate that both sides of the issue are claiming that a middle ground is best, and possibly the debate is starting to burn out, a phenomenon that may indicate a social compromise of sorts. Indeed, several of the authors in the whole language / phonics debate use argue against an 'either-or' dichotomy, much as Byrnes did (see above).

Related to that topic is a social issue which might be both a topic and a strategy: the role of government and politics as an influence on applied linguistics. The phonics/whole language debate is rife with claim and counter-claim of what the U.S. government is doing or what it might do. For example, in citation 1, many of the respondents fear that Adams' book and its summary will be mis-applied by the U.S. government as pro-phonics when some middle road is actually better. Appeal to de facto government policy, both as a strategy and a topic of discussion, also appears in citation 3 where the question of world English spread is raised (as it is to some extent in 35). Other governments are also discussed and clarified in 9 and 11.

Indeed, citations 9 and 11 are unique because in this small sample of 40 papers they are the only instance of two reviews of the same book: Rosalee Pedalino Porter's Forked Tongue: The Politics of Bilingual Education (New York: Basic Books, 1990). Both reviewers are quite negative about the book, and in their

reviews discuss its influence in perpetuating what Cummins calls "the disinformation campaign being waged in the United States against bilingual education." (p. 792) Perhaps this is an example of a book as a topic -- a book as a lightning rod for attracting scholarly attention and dispelling of myth.[3]

One other common topic that which these papers address is the complex issue of how to best serve language minority students in the United States, and by implication (and some overt discussion) in other countries as well. The social responsibility overtones of this topic are not overtones at all. They are deeply sounded chords of worry about mistreatment of young people. Examples of this literature are citations 9, 11, 22, 28, 29, 38. These publications use many strategies to set the record straight and dispel myths, for example Kagan et al. remarking in 22 that they wish to do away with the misconception that very young children "'sop up' a language in a year or less" (p. 430). Or as another example there is the misconception that the U.S. linguistic situation can be compared to that of Canada; this is covered in numbers 9 and 29.

Other topics that appear in this study's dialog literature include:

-gender and language (2, 34)

-literacy (1, 8, 32, 38, 39)

-proficiency vs. accuracy in second/foreign languages (5, 17,

24)

-speech and hearing science topics, e.g. stuttering and aphasia (7, 10)

-language death (13, 27)

-language and the perception of reality (18, 21, 25, 26)

-existence of language in species other than homo sapiens (3, 30, 37)

Concluding remarks.

The 'sense' embodied in the citations studied here is 'to set the record straight' or dispel myth and misconception, where that dispelling is done out of some sort of worry about social good. As noted above, for one citation, the phrase 'set the record straight' appeared in the paper itself and was also retained in its LLBA abstract. That citation's use captures the intent of this study nicely, and it is presented here in its entirety:

> However, educators are not the cause of any decline or rise of poverty in the United States. Government officials, chief executive officers (CEOs), and media pundits use a curious logic to link the two. This logic and the human suffering that it attempts to hide are literacy issues because they require critical reading to expose the illusion they project, writing **to set the record straight**, and action to demonstrate that schools could be places where teachers and students develop democratic voices in order to struggle against the realities of poverty in America. This literacy involves a language of critique to demystify the complexities of modern living and a language of hope to reinject human agency into schools. (Shannon, citation 32,

p. 87; emphasis added)

In summary, this study was a review of 40 citations representing 63 papers, all of which dispel myths and pertain (somehow) to social responsibility. The review was done by use of the ERIC and LLBA online databases and by culling of articles which did not seem to fit that focus. In an interest to claim recency, the study then worked backwards through the candidate citations. The 40 citations contain 63 separate papers. There are, clearly, many ways to set the record straight, for multiple strategies were identified.[4] Furthermore, the 40 citations cover many vibrant socially relevant topics in Markee's 'weak' -- or wide -- definition of applied linguistics, and some topics were more prevalent than others, even in this small sample.

What does this say about the social health of applied linguistics? More accurately, is this sufficient? Is the normal process of scholarly dialog in citations like these a real and valid means by which applied linguists re-adjust their social, communal thinking? Often, in reading this literature, there is a sense of being on a ship. The forty citations were like tugboats, bumping against the ship to correct it in mid-course. The reader does not know how far the ship is from the dock, nor indeed, did whether it is going **out to sea** or coming **in to port**. But the tugboats were there -- all forty of them. And they do **not** apply their pressure simultaneously. Sometimes the ship

seems piloted toward one topic, sometimes toward another, and certain tugs seem to appear and disappear. Or perhaps, indeed, there were several ships in the water and the tugs must go from one ship to another for their piloting duties (e.g., the whole language dialog also applies to literacy and to politics).

But the question is this: shall applied linguistics trust its ship to keep on course, given these tugboats? Does the process of scholarly dialog help ensure social responsibility in applied linguistics?

Perhaps applied linguistics itself can trust its scholarly tugboats, but that says nothing of non-academic vessels, which can and do wander all over the ocean. Cummins, in his remarks at the AAAL colloquium, remarked that there is a problem with purveying applied linguistics to the lay public. He discussed at some length the persistent myths that pervade bilingual education in elementary and secondary education in the U.S.A., topics he also covers in citation 9 studied here. More generally, any academic discipline can do all it wants to correct itself, but if persons outside the discipline do not read that literature, then social good might not ensue. The record might never be put right unless it is done so outside academic journals and conferences and is read by people in positions of power and influence. Keen attention to dialog **between** academia and non-academia is equally (if not more) important than dialog **among** academicians.

Notes:

[1]One problem arose: neither ERIC nor LLBA permit a to search for 'to' as a keyword string. 'To' is a stopword, similar to 'the' or 'from'. Therefore, searches could not be limited to titles in which, for example, 'reply' was followed immediately by 'to', and so literature on topics like syntax of replies and response timing became hits.

[2]Row J indicates the phenomenon mentioned in note 1 above. There were a lot of hits on 'respon*' from literature on response rate and similar topics, which is why the hit-to-candidate counts drop off so drastically (683 to 24 and 597 to 85).

[3]In that regard, another possible example would be the recent controversial book by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray called The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life. (New York: The Free Press, 1994). That book treats controversial topics such as heredity and race and their effects on intelligence. Herrnstein and Murray bring to mind Dillon et al., in citation 12 (p. 186), who note that it is very difficult for critical linguistics "to distance itself from the very power relations it seeks to deconstruct". The record in Herrnstein and Murray's book is actively being put right. (See Fraser, 1995; Davidson, forthcoming).

[4]To some extent, this paper serves another function: it presents

strategies which scholars can later employ when they with to dispel myth. However, that pedagogical spinoff was not the intent of this research.

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